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Ekman: The Face of Man: Expressions of Universal Emotions in a New Guinea Village

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accurate because the stimulus is uninformative. DePaulo and Rosenthal's failure to do the appropriate analyses to test this alternative (for example, by partialing out overall accuracy or by computing transformations of the original data) is symptomatic of Rosenthal's and his colleagues' general neglect of stimulus information.

Buck's literature review and analysis of individual difference in internal and external responses to emotional stimuli is well done. Other papers in this volume, however, are less successful. For example, the paper by DiMatteo concludes that a physician's success with patients depends in part on his or her nonverbal skill; yet the data for this conclusion are very weak. Zuckerman and Larrance describe new measures of subjects' perceived nonverbal abilities; while they provide an elaborate justification for why these self-perceptions might have importance in their own right, the failure of the self-perception tests to correlate with actual nonverbal success undercuts their value.

In summary, this is a book that promises more than it delivers. Its self-appointed task is to show the value of the *idiographic* approach to the study of nonverbal communication. Despite several excellent and provocative chapters, I was left unconvinced of the value of this enterprise.

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This book is an engaging little volume. On the surface, however, it seems never quite to have decided what to be about. On one hand, the reader finds sixty pages devoted mainly to answering affirmatively a very old question: Are facial expressions for human emotions the same in all cultures? On the other hand, one is presented with about eighty pages of heart-warming black-and-white facial expressions (of Woman and Child as well as "Man") in a single village of a single tribe (the Fore of New Guinea). At first glance, one cannot understand how the two sections might have landed between the covers of one book. The sense of incongruity is heightened when one places the sometimes technical and closely argued text in juxtaposition with the tone of the plates and their captions, which are sometimes playful and always informal. Thus, for example, Plate 336 of a photogenic young woman in a crouching position is labeled, "A better view of that tight-lipped embarrassed smile"; and Plates 46 to 52 "were not selected to illustrate facial expression but to show the beauty and appeal of these people." Furthermore, not a single one of the plates is specifically cited in the text, yet Ekman assures the reader that the pictures "tell the story of what I found" and are, after all, "the best argument" for the case of cultural universality of facial expressions (p. 12).

But when one finally sees the light, the apparent lack of integration in the book's structure dissipates somewhat, for it turns out that Ekman's research among the Fore—though not the pictures themselves—did play a pivotal role in his argument for universality; and if the claim of universality is valid, then the faces of the Fore—like the faces of any other human beings—are nothing less than perfectly representative of the whole species. Granting the plates this much relevance to the book's thesis, and admitting that they are quite entertaining, I turn to the book's weightier portion: the section entitled "Darwin and Cross-Cultural Studies of Facial Expression."

Ekman begins by summarizing the view of Charles Darwin (1965) on the subject. While Ekman ultimately finds himself squarely in Darwin's camp on the basic issue of universality, he attempts to put a little distance between Darwin and himself. He does so by attributing to Darwin the belief that establishing the cultural universality of facial expressions would prove that "they must be inherited" (p. 93). But, says Ekman,

this last step in Darwin's thinking can be disputed. Universality increases the *likelihood* that inheritance determines the form and appearance of facial expressions, but it does not prove an innate basis for facial expression, since there are other explanations available. [ibid.]

Ekman then states that he himself has previously outlined several alternative explanations which could also account for universality, but he offers only the sketchiest description of them. Next, Ekman proceeds to a brief but competent discussion of methodological deficiencies in Darwin's work, being careful, however, to credit him with originating "judgment studies of the face," in which observers are asked to interpret emotions depicted in paintings, photographs, or motion pictures. Most of Ekman's own research has been of this type.

Ekman's discussion of Darwin illustrates four mixed qualities that recur in the subsequent analysis and that typify its best and worst sides. These are (1) careful explanation of valuable conceptual distinctions (as between the problems of establishing universality and explaining it), (2) an excellent eye for defects in the logic and method of other research in the area, (3) overly cryptic references to his own previous research, and (4) overdrawn battle lines between himself and ostensible opponents.

Did Darwin actually believe, as Ekman implies, that establishing universality would be tantamount to demonstrating biological heredity as the basis of facial expression? Apparently not, for in the very passage cited by Ekman (p. 92), we find Darwin asserting only that universality allows one to "infer with much probability" a hereditary basis. This does not really sound much different from Ekman's own statement that universality "increases the likelihood" of a panspecific genetic derivation of facial expression. Another respect in which Ekman overstates his disagreement with Darwin concerns the question of whether *all* facial expressions are universal. In the text, Darwin is portrayed as an extreme advocate of universality; only in a footnote does Ekman admit that Darwin, like himself, does not claim that all facial expressions are universal, only those for certain emotions.

Ekman next identifies the opponents of the universality position: three "extremely influential" behavioral scientists who have asserted that "the existence of universal facial expressions is dubious or disproved" (p. 96). They are Otto Klineberg, Weston La Barre, and Ray Birdwhistell. To make a twelve-page story short, Ekman finds that (1) Klineberg's data against universality were misinterpreted, (2) La Barre's were irrelevant, and (3) Birdwhistell's were never even revealed!

Klineberg's data consisted of descriptions of facial expressions he located in Chinese literature, anecdotal reports by observers of different cultures, and a 1935 study by J. P. Foley which, according to its author, indicated that undergraduates at Columbia University were unable to correctly identify the emotion underlying facial expres-

sions of chimpanzees. As for the literary and anecdotal evidence, Ekman points out that it is questionable in terms of reliability, accuracy, and generality. Furthermore, even if true it would not suffice to prove the case against universality. This is because cultures differ in the specific conditions ("elicitors") which evoke a given emotion, and also because they differ in norms ("display rules") regarding the expected management of facial appearance (p. 97). Thus, were we to find a culture in which people generally exhibited smiling expressions at funerals, it would not necessarily be because smiling in this culture indicated sadness; instead, it may be that the event actually does elicit joy among most of those attending—perhaps owing to differing conceptions of death—or that the culture considers it proper to mask the underlying sadness with a happy face. Surely these are cogent concepts which represent a significant contribution to this area of research.

Ekman next attempts a statistical reinterpretation of Foley's above-mentioned chimpanzee study, but I do not believe that statistically adept readers will find it altogether satisfactory. The technical argument need not be taken up here, however, since, as Ekman himself points out, this whole cross-specific approach is of dubious relevance.

In placing La Barre among the "extremely influential" opponents of universality, Ekman once again, as with Darwin, conjures up a conflict that is more apparent than real. La Barre has indeed been influential as an anthropologist but certainly not as a cultural particularist, as would seem likely from the role in which he is cast by Ekman. In fact, psychoanalytic anthropology, the subdiscipline to which La Barre has made his truly singular contributions, has since its inception been characterized by its insistence on the fundamental significance of cultural similarities or universals, even when this interest was rejected by anthropology as a whole (Roheim 1950:2-3). In the first of his major works, La Barre begins by observing:

Anthropologists now see that we have been so successful in establishing the relativity of culture as to risk throwing out the baby with the bath: the universal similarities of all mankind. [1954:xiii]

One begins to suspect that it was not easy for Ekman to come up with his opponents on the issue of facial-expressive universality when it is found that La Barre himself (1978:289) regards the piece criticized by Ekman as among his least-developed studies in the area of non-verbal communication. This suspicion grows when Ekman himself points out that La Barre's position is by no means directly opposed to the universality position, but complementary to it:

La Barre was really writing about gesture, not emotional expression, and in that sense does not contradict Darwin, who was more concerned with emotional expression. [p. 102]

At least Ekman manages to put this rather artificial opposition to constructive use, by taking the opportunity to give a summary (p. 102)—all too brief—of a noteworthy classification of nonverbal behavior devised by himself and Wallace Friesen. As in several other places in the book, scholars will be disappointed by the sketchy reference to an intriguing idea developed thoroughly only in a previous and possibly less accessible place. It is therefore important not to be led by the book's main title into mistaking it for a scientific *magnum opus*; indeed, nearly the whole text is itself reprinted from a brief, previously published summary of Ekman's research (p. 91). The volume, after all, is primarily a pleasant picture book.

Undoubtedly, Ray Birdwhistell comes off as the most recalcitrantly wrong-headed of the opponents of universality: Ekman (p. 107) declares him a "captive of his own . . . model," who simply asserts his views without offering any documentation to support them.

Ekman then moves through a systematic critique of research attempting to prove the culture-specific hypothesis. This section is well executed and leads to the following conclusion:

The experiments failed to establish cultural differences because of the limited number of people whose faces were shown, or because of contradictions in the findings within or across studies, or because of the possible presence of blends of two or more emotions in the stimuli. [p. 123]

Finally, Ekman examines research—mostly his own—attempting to demonstrate universality. In literate societies, use of word lists along with photographs of expressions make cross-cultural judgment studies relatively effective. While the results of such studies clearly favored the universality hypothesis, they left open one loophole: the possibility that widely disseminated mass-media portrayals of recent times account for the observed cross-cultural similarity of facial expressions. Ekman knows well how to use his opponents for his own purposes, and at this moment he calls on one in order to heighten the reader's sense of drama. Of the mass-media argument, he writes:

While this seemed improbable, the argument was made, presumably with some seriousness, by one of the advocates of the view that there are no universal facial expressions of emotion: Birdwhistell. [p. 127]

Thus, the "only way" to seal the case for universality would be to obtain comparable results in a visually isolated, preliterate culture. A note of urgency is injected, since very soon visually isolated peoples will disappear: "This was one of the last chances . . . to settle the question first raised by Darwin" (p. 129). Enter the Fore at last!

After devising emotion-inducing stories (word lists being obviously useless), Ekman found that extremely high percentages of the Fore subjects selected the same picture to illustrate each story as had the members of literate societies. Karl and Eleanor Heider replicated the experiment among the Dani of New Guinea and obtained similar results.

The psychoanalytically oriented reader will find oversimple Ekman's assumption that human emotions, in the absence of consciously controlled display rules, will be directly manifest in facial expression. For example, the concept of reaction formation implies that extremely powerful emotions may be effectively masked by a totally unconscious process. In this view, the effect of culture on emotional expression is seen as running far deeper than Ekman seems to recognize. The defense mechanism is erected due not to what people are taught to display but to an unconscious conflict between ego and id over what to feel. While this does not contradict Ekman's findings, it does suggest that he deals with human emotion at a rather superficial level.

Perhaps the least charitable characterization which could be made of the whole line of research summarized in this book is that it seems a roundabout path to an unremarkable conclusion. Nonetheless, the road from "common sense" to scientific verification is long, and Ekman deserves credit for having clarified and strengthened the case for cultural universality of facial expressions.

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